

## 9 DOODLEBUG ALLEY,

It was June. Kent was a restricted area. We were only allowed into Gravesend to go to work or to go shopping. The Commandos moved out of Chalk Road, all the soldiers had gone, all the lorries ambulances and armoured vehicles had gone and all the landing ships and barges had sailed. The river was full of shipping. The air raids had started again. They were very heavy and we were back sleeping in the shelters,

It was the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1944. D Day had arrived at last. We have invaded Normandy. I woke up and left the shelter. I looked up and the sky was full of planes towing gliders full of troops on their way to Normandy. Peter has been on duty with the Home Guard. He said that it had been like that all night, planes going over all the time. Everyone is excited but worried about friends and relations serving the invasion forces.

All day the planes and gliders were going over. The news was good. We have secured substantial bridgeheads. We discovered what the large floating drums were. They were for a Pipe Line Under The Ocean to carry petrol for the troops in Normandy (P L U T O). The large blocks of concrete that were made at Northfleet Cement Works were part of Mulberry Harbour, a floating dock so that supplies could be unloaded straight on to the landing beaches instead of waiting for the allies to capture a French port from the Germans.

Peter and I were watching the search lights when they caught this German plane in their beams. Suddenly we heard the sound of machine gun fire as a night fighter attacked and shot it down. Flames were coming out of the rear of it, and when it hit the ground there was a big explosion. We cheered thinking that a German plane had been shot down before it could bomb its target. But as we carried on watching we saw more of these plane with flames shooting out of their tails shoot across the sky. They made a noise like a motor bike engine. When the flame goes out the engine stops and everything goes quiet. You can hear a pin drop. After about thirty seconds there was a very big explosion. The V 1 Flying Bomb has arrived, The Doodlebug, a terror weapon and it's was flight path was right over Kent. Day and night they came over. There were more AA Guns in a straight line from the river up the back of Castle Lane up through Cobham and Shorne over towards Tunbridge. They were about five hundred yards apart. You can imagine the noise when they were all firing. Then there was a line of barrage balloons and then another line of guns all the way from the coast to London. They started to evacuate all the children from the London area. Again a lot of people killed, but we still carried on as best we could. They would come over and you all held your breath hoping the engine would not stop. When it did everything went quite as you waited for the bang then you got up looked round and if everything was ok you carried on what you were doing .

One evening I was talking to Teddy Weeks and his sisters when the siren went and we heard this Doodlebug. We looked up and saw it in the distance heading our way. We dashed into their house. When the engine stopped we all threw ourselves onto the hall floor and waited. Everything went quite except for the rush of air as it went over the house. It must have missed the roof by about four foot. It glided about two hundred yards towards the Dickens Estate when it hit the only tree near the ditch from North Court School (where we ducked the bullies that day). If it had carried on another hundred yard it would have flattened the Dickens Housing Estate. We all dashed over to see if anyone needed any help or first aid. The only damage was a few windows broken and a few tiles blown of the roofs. How lucky can you get?

Jean was back at home working at the Seamen's Hospital I was still working at the Uralite. As you left for work each day you kept your eyes and ears open for the Doodlebugs. If you saw one you watched which way it was going if it wasn't anywhere near you, you just carried on there wasn't anything we could do about. The launching sites for the Flying Bombs were in the Calais area in France. The Canadians were trying to capture the area.

But the Germans had another terror weapon. It was the V2, a rocket you couldn't hear or see. The first thing you knew about it was a big explosion. There wasn't anything you could do about it. Again there were hundreds killed. All that anyone could do was to get on with the war effort, if it had your name on it hard luck.

Jean wasn't too well one night. She and Mum left the air raid shelter and went into the house. There was a air raid taking place that went on all night. The next morning Mum told us that Jean had had a baby boy, and that she was calling him Terry. They were both alright. As far as I was concerned I had another brother, and what a fuss we all made of him (and still do). We now had two babies to spoil rotten.

I was in the orchard picking fruit when I heard this voice 'Give us an apple please mister but don't fall of the ladder this time.' It was Ivy and her younger brothers. I gave them some fruit and chatted to them and as I had finished picking fruit. I said I would see them safely home. I filled a bag with apples and pears, got my bike and walked her home. They lived on the Dickens Estate about three hundred yards from where the flying bomb had landed. I arranged to meet her outside the pictures the following weekend. I got to know the family very well.

We had two rockets fall on Gravesend. The first fell in Portland Avenue near Echo Square. Five people were killed. The second missile destroyed four homes and an engineering works in Milton Place killing eight people and injured over fifty. It was down near the Prom just after a dance had finished as everyone was just leaving. The flying bombs had stopped at last. The launching sites had been captured. The war news was good. Paris and Brussels had been liberated and the Army was advancing towards Holland.

The Germans had sent some 8,000 Flying Bombs over Kent and 2,300 had got though to London. More than 20,000 houses were damaged. No wonder they called Kent 'Doodlebug Alley'.

One morning in September I was woken up by the sound of aircraft flying over the house. When I looked up all I could see was hundreds of planes towing gliders passing over our house. They were on their way to Arnhem in Holland where a battle was being fought by the British and American Airborne troops to capture the bridges over the Rhine into Germany. It lasted for nine days but the British Airborne Division cut off, out of supplies and outnumbered had to withdraw.

Peter had to register for military service and to have a medical which he failed because he a perforated eardrum. And as he was in a reserved occupation he didn't get called up into the forces.

The war dragged on in France trying to find a way across the river Rhine into Germany. The news from Italy was better. The battle for Monte Cassino was over. Rome had been captured on the 6th of June.

The travelling restriction had been lifted. Mum, Jean, Pat, Terry and I decided to go and visit Granddad and Grandma Spenceley in London. The last time we visited them was early in the war. If you caught a train before 9 o'clock the fare was only nine pence return. The journey took two hours. Everywhere you looked all you could see was bomb damaged and burnt buildings and notices with Danger Unexploded Bomb. Their flat wasn't too badly damaged, but they had had a lot of bombs all round them and buildings in their road had been burnt down, but they were in great spirits. They were over 70. They had stayed in London throughout the Blitz and the rockets and flying bombs. There were still air raids and we had to leave early before it got dark. We didn't want to be caught in an air raid.

Everyone was getting fed up with the war. Another Christmas was coming and there was very little in the shops. Things were getting in short supply but we just had to get on with it and make the best of it. We still had to get the chickens and turkeys ready for delivery for Christmas dinners. Everyone helped out. There was bad news from France. The Germans had put in a surprise attack and broken through the Americans positions and they were in full retreat. British troops had to go and help them out and stop the Germans AGAIN. It was called the Battle of the Bulge.

I went to a Christmas party at Ivy's. Her eldest brother was home on leave from the Navy and had a good time. All our mates were there and on New Year Eve we went and had another party at one of her friends.

It was a cold and frosty winter. There was plenty of snow and it lasted until the end of February. Everyone was fed up with the cold weather. Coal was rationed so we cut down some of the old trees in the orchard and chopped them up into logs for the fire to keep the place warm for the babies Pat and Terry. Dad had bought more pigs. There must have been over thirty. To feed them he had a contract with the council. They collected the pig swill and delivered it and he bought a special boiler to cook it in before he fed it to the pigs. The police used to come and check that he was doing this and count the number of pigs to make sure that they didn't catch Swine Fever or Foot and Mouth Disease. Things were looking up. The driver of the lorry delivering the swill was called Sam Shoveller. They became great friends and he came and helped out when he could.

The war news was good they had crossed the River Rhine into Germany. It seems that the end of the war with Germany is in sight. The Rockets are still falling on Kent and causing casualties. According to records since the campaign began last September 1,115 have been fired at Britain, 64 have landed in Kent. The first

one fell in Portland Avenue Gravesend killing five people and the last one landed at Orpington, Kent and killed a 34 year old house wife on March 28<sup>th</sup>.

By now the blackout had been lifted and of an evening we all went to Chalk Village and hung around out in the cold by the gas lamp outside Chalk School. We were standing there deciding where to go and what to do when I said why don't we start a youth club? But where? Why not in the school it wasn't used now that the Home Guard had been stood down.

But how do we get in? No trouble. We all knew from our school days that you could open one of the windows at the back of the building from the outside. When we tried we found that it had been nailed up. In the end we tried the front door. That opened without much trouble. The place wasn't in bad condition but there was no electricity switched on. There were no fuses but we soon had the lights on with the blackout screens still in place.

We decided to go and see the vicar Mr Bowman. He listened to what we had to say and said that there would have to be an adult in charge. In the meantime we should form a committee and that we weren't to break into the school again, but to come and ask for the keys. As long as there was someone responsible over 16 it would be alright and he would see if he could find an adult who was willing to help form a youth club.

We held a meeting and elected a committee. I was made chairman, Alan Grewcock was secretary and Bob Court treasurer. All was going well.